**Activity:** Philosophy Comics

**Grade Level:** 9-12

**Summary:**

Students will research individual figures in philosophy as well as important ideologies and schools of thought in the philosophical tradition. They will decide upon an interesting question or contentious issue to debate, and then write a short (3-4 pages) research paper in addition to planning out a summarized form of their argument that can be conveyed in a series of 4-5 strips created through the “Make Beliefs Comix” website. (One way to do this would simply be to have a conversation taking place between two characters; the comics themselves don’t have to be very complicated although students may present their argument through a story, poem or other narrative device if they wish.)

These strips will then be printed and incorporated together on a poster to put up in the classroom. Additionally, students will create one individual strip that gives brief biographical or historical information about their philosopher/philosophical school and then post and share this via e-mail. While this is covered in more depth in the lesson plan itself, the rough timeline for this project would be several weeks to a month to cover the material and a minimum of a full week for students to complete the assignment itself.

**Content Goals:**

Learn about key philosophers and ideas, gain familiarity/practice with academic research and citation, engage in critical thought and analysis of material, formulate theses, construct rational and logical arguments, and convey ideas through a variety of forms/media.

**Lesson Plan:**

This activity would take place within an introductory unit on philosophy. During class, and prior to the start of the assignment, students would be exposed to summary versions of major philosophers and areas of debate within this branch of study. For instance, ancient Greek and Roman philosophy would give a brief look at Epicureanism, Stoicism, and hedonism. Modern philosophy would include a look at Descartes and his central thesis as well as ideas raised by Nietzsche. Other general debates could include moral relativism versus absolutism, utilitarianism versus Kantian ethics, and so on. (This seems like a lot of material to cover, but these would be very cursory looks that cover the major points of these ideas within the space of a few class periods- not an in-depth examination. Depending on the breadth of material covered I’d put the length of time needed to prepare students for the assignment at several weeks to a month.)

After having had exposure to the material, as well as time to debate it with their fellow peers and review it in class, students would then form groups of 3-4 people and decide on a central question or point of debate that they find interesting. Hopefully this shouldn’t require too much scaffolding as the material will have been framed in a way that closely ties philosophers and ideologies together with these questions (they should be raised for the students’ consideration as the information is presented), but the instructor may choose to offer some topics if the students need guidance in finding a place to start.

The instructor will then go over the research and assignment guidelines with the students. At this grade level I’d expect students to be familiar with research and citation but it may help to go over a specific citation format (MLA, for example) and provide reference sheets with examples of in-text and bibliographical citations. Likewise, the instructor can make students aware of their resources by recommending sites such as the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy and letting them know of any databases available to them through the school’s online library if it has one.

One class period will also be taken to bring the students to the computer lab, introduce them to the Make Beliefs website (as well as any other online resources the teacher wishes to provide) and allow them to familiarize themselves with it and create a test comic or two. Following this, students will have a period of at least one week to collaborate with their group members outside of class and put together their paper, comic poster, and biographical/historical comic to be posted and e-mailed to the instructor. (Students are free to share their comics with whomever they like, of course, and e-mailing a finished strip also allows the recipient to post it on Facebook. However, any further sharing is completely optional.)

**NETS -S**

http://www.iste.org/docs/pdfs/nets-s-standards.pdf?sfvrsn=2

Creativity and Innovation

1. Apply existing knowledge to generate new ideas, products, or processes.
2. Create original works as a means of personal or group expression.

Communication and Collaboration

1. Communicate information and ideas effectively to multiple audiences using a variety of media and formats.

d. Contribute to project teams to produce original works or solve problems.

Research and Information Fluency

1. Plan strategies to guide inquiry.
2. Locate, organize, analyze, evaluate, synthesize, and ethically use information from a variety of sources and media.
3. Evaluate and select information sources and digital tools based on the appropriateness to specific tasks.

Critical Thinking, Problem Solving, and Decision Making

1. Identify and define authentic problems and significant questions for investigation.
2. Plan and manage activities to develop a solution or complete a project.
3. Collect and analyze data to identify solutions and/or make informed decisions.
4. Use multiple processes and diverse perspectives to explore alternative solutions.

Digital Citizenship

1. Advocate and practice safe, legal, and responsible use of information and technology.
2. Exhibit a positive attitude toward using technology that supports collaboration, learning, and productivity.
3. Demonstrate personal responsibility for lifelong learning.
4. Exhibit leadership for digital citizenship.

Technology Operations and Concepts

1. Understand and use technology systems.
2. Select and use applications effectively and productively.
3. Troubleshoot systems and applications.
4. Transfer current knowledge to learning new technologies.